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THE NATIONAL ERA.

WASHINGTON, JULY 29, 1850.

SKETCHES OF OUR VILLAGE.

No. 2.

A SABBATH AT 1776.

BY MARTHA RUSSELL.

Late in the fall of 1847, it was my good fortune to spend several delightful hours in the gallery of the "Art Union" in New York. Among the many exquisite pictures that graced its walls, was one which particularly attracted my attention. Not that I either comprehended or was much influenced by the learned and technical criticisms of the connoisseurs at my elbow, but it was a New England scene. "The first news of the battle of Lexington," by Ranney, and for its truth and spirit I could well vouch.

It represented a New England landscape in the capricious month of April, with all the shows of awakening agricultural life and industry. A village smithy in the foreground, while I could have almost identified, under the projecting roof of which stood the brawny-armed smith himself, with compressed lips and knotted brows, fastening a shoe to the reeking horse of a courier, (how much more significant the old Saxon word *hodwæs*), who, still in the saddle, hurriedly told his tale of "fate and fears" to the excited listeners that had already reached the spot. All along the road were seen hurrying stalwart men, with the implements of till so still in their hands; in the fields, the plough and oxen were left midway in the furrow, while their master, without bridle or saddle, sprang upon the stout farm horse, and with his strong hand twisted in his shaggy mane, the gears still trailing at his heels, and nose high in the air, guided him, at an undreamed-of pace, across the fields, and over fences, toward the scene of excitement.

I knew many in my native village that might have stood as the originals of those men, aye, and not a few horses that might upon occasion have taken very look and bait. But more than this, as I gazed upon that picture, the shadowy forms of the white-haired fathers of our village seemed to take the place of the gaily-dressed people at my side, and stand leaning, as their wont, over their stout oaken sticks, as they told over again their "tales of the times of old." One of these, which picture vividly recalled, and which would not be an unseemly subject for the artist, I shall attempt to relate.

One Sabbath morning, during the gloomy summer of 1776, when the hopes of the patriots seemed likely to go down in darkness and blood, and even the God-sustained heart of Washington grovèd, and almost sank within him, the people of our village came up to the house of God with sad countenances and heavy hearts. News travelled slowly then, and they were chiefly induced to such wounded soldiers as passed through the village, on their way to their homes, for their information of the movements of the army. They knew that Washington still held New York, and the last poor wounded fellow that had reached home had told a fearful tale of the state of our diminished army, and the hordes of troops under the Housers, that were gathering around it like locusts.

It was a beautiful mid-summer morning. A light thunder shower, during the latter part of the preceding night, had laid the dust and given coolness to the air. The rain drops still hung trembling from leaf and spray, and came dropping down in showers, as the footsteps of pedestrains or the heavy tramp of horses, bearing in most instances the double burden of man and mutton with perchance a royal child or two, started from their quivering perches like silver-thrashed birds. The grain was already harvested, but many fields of grass were still standing, brown and sunburnt; and it was very evident that many of the crops suffered from lack of proper cultivation, for many of the most expert wielders of the hoe and scythe had already exchanged them for the musket and sword. Still, here and there a piece of Indian corn stood up thirly, through the broad leaves of which the faint west wind rustled with a low murmurous sound, like the dropping of summer rain. In the southwest, just above the top of Totoket, appeared the white caps of two or three of those singular clouds, known among the country people as "thunderheads." But the people, as they pursued their way along the green lanes and over the forest-crowded hills, had other thoughts than of the beauty of the landscape. Their hearts were with their brothers and friends; their thoughts turned towards Him who is both able to build up and cast down, before whose altar they were accustomed to cast all their cares and troubles.

As with slow and reverent steps they filed into the meeting-house and took their seats in the square pews, it was easily seen that the greater portion of the male part of the congregation consisted of men advanced in years, and boys in their teens. The morning service passed as usual, and, after a short intermission, the people again gathered to their pews, and the earnest prayer was offered, and a sermon, suited to the exigencies of the times and the wants of the audience, was commenced. Suddenly, the congregation were startled by the heavy tramp of a horse, which rapidly approached and halted by the meeting-house door. In a moment the rider had thrown himself from the saddle, and stood within the door. Hailing a note to the aged deacon, who was hurrying down the aisle to ask the cause of this untoward interruption, with a audible whispering injunction to act with speed, he hastily mounted, and kept on his way. The deacon cast one glance at the representation of the paper, then marched reverently up the pulpit stairs, and placed it in the hand of the minister, with some whispered injunction. Deliberately the old man finished his sermon and prayer, then glancing his eye over the paper, he laid it's contents before the people. It was a pressing requisition from Washington for more troops. He was daily expecting an attack from the combined forces of the enemy, and each town and village was called upon to furnish what aid it could. After a few sputtering eloquent requests on the critical situation of the beloved chieftain, the worthy man enquired—"Let us not be too much cast down, my brethren. Our cause is that of truth and justice and righteousness; and, when we are in these, we shall yet assuredly triumph. This business is urgent, and, I trust, it will not be deemed derogatory to a Christian character, nor an infringement upon the holy Sabbath, if we take such measures as seem most proper to-day. Therefore, all who are willing to take their lives in their hands, and stand by the side of the Commander-in-chief, in this hour of trial, will, after the close of these services, please range themselves in single file, upon the village common."

The old man was much moved by this unexpected proof of their esteem and confidence. It was the highest honor in their gift, and he fully appreciated the compliment and the responsibility. He had too much of the old Parisian spirit in him to decline his heart's desire, and, with a few words, but few, however bold, he signified his willingness to stand by them in life and in death. Then, beckoning the females to advance, he bowed his head, and, like a true Cromwellian, called down the blessing of Heaven on them and their posterity.

For the National Era.

THE FREEMAN'S DREAM: A PARABLE.

BY HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

It seemed to him that it was a summer evening, and he was walking calmly up and down his estate, watching the ripening grain and listening to the distant voices of his children, as they played by his door, and the song of his wife as she rocked her babe to rest, and the soul of the man grew soft within him, and he gave God thanks with a full heart.

But now there came towards him in the twilight a poor black man, worn and wasted, his clothes rent and travel-soiled, and his step trembling and fearful. He was one that had dwelt in darkness, and as one that had been long dead; and behind him, fearfully, a thin and trembling woman, with a wailing babe at her bosom, and a frightened child clinging to her skirts; and the man held out his hand wistfully, and begged for food and shelter, if only for one night, for the purser was behind him, and his soul failed him for want of strength.

The man was not hard, and his heart misgave him when he looked on the falling eye of the poor black man, and the woman with her babe, when they were weary and footsore, and there was no more strength in them. And the man heard their screams, and saw them bound and taken by those that would not show mercy.

And after these things the man dreamed, and he awoke with a start, and the sun was rising.

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